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ABSTRACT

Believing that an individual's development is strongly influenced by the way the person perceives his or her environment, Kurt Lewin had a strong influence on the theoretical foundations of social-emotional climate research. Lewin's theories may be compared with the following basic theoretical foundations of social climate research: symbolic interactionism; the environmental psychology of Wohlwill; Barker's ecological psychology; Brunswik's theory; the need-press-concept of Murray; Bronfenbrenner's ideas concerning topological regions; the concept of isomorphy; and the social learning theories of Rotter, Mischel, and Bandura. Most of these theories were influenced by Lewin's ideas concerning the importance of the subjective environment. In addition to theoretical contributions, Lewin also contributed empirical results, including his investigation of human behavior in different social emotional climates and his social research in factories. However, a big discrepancy exists between theory and practice in social-emotional climate research, especially with regard to the use of questionnaires and their inability to generate objective findings. (RM)

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# Kurt Lewin's Influence on Social Emotional Climate Research in Germany and the United States[1)]

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SUMMARY

In the first section of the paper a description of how Kurt Lewin was rediscovered in Germany after the Second World War will be given. In the first phase of this rediscovery there was a inner resistance against the work of Lewin, because his theory was not compatible with traditional thought in psychology. It was only later that he was received normally.

The second part of the article will be about social-emotional research, its American sources and its transfer to Germany. Then some of theoretical background of this research area will be reviewed briefly and Lewin's influence in this respect will be discussed. It will become abvious that Lewin's theoretical influence on social emotional climate research can be best detected in post - Lewinian theories.

Finally the common practice of climate research will be reviewed and the relation of Lewinian theory to this practical aspect will be discussed.

The main task of this paper is a survey of Lewin's influence on social emotional climate research in Germany and the U.S. There are several areas where this influence can be illustrated. Most important in this respect is the theoretical background of social emotional climate research. Nobody can deny that Lewin's theories have had the greatest effect in this area. The explanation for this is easy: climate research tries to capture the environment as it is seen by the person who lives in it. Lewin defines environment, i.e. the situation or life space exactly in the above mentioned way. But before coming to the description of Lewin's impact on specific areas of research, Lewin's Reception in Germany will be examined.

## Kurt Lewin's reception in Germany

When Germans think about Kurt Lewin, they have certain associations.

1) The first may be: He was a psychologist. This idea may seem rather trivial, but, in fact, it leads us to the core of this man. Lewin was more than a psychologist: he was a behavioral scientist. It is known that the word "psychology" came from Greek where it means "theory of life". But this originally broad meaning has changed into a narrower one: in many respects it has become a synonym for pure behaviorism. And the work of psychologists was greatly directed by methodological ones should have been the center. In this sense Kurt Lewin was more than a psychologist.

2) A second association is often: He was a scientist, who had to emigrate because of his Jewish background at the beginning of the thirties. The mention of this fact is not very pleasant to many people of Germany. Reminiscences of the Third Reich will come to the surface.

3) A third association may lead us to the man, who formulated the 'field theory' and described it in purely mathematical terms utilizing topology.

After the Second World War the name of Kurt Lewin once again became known in Germany, but his rediscovery took some time. His main publications-except for some important articles as for example "Kriegslandschaft" - were first written in English and only at the beginning of the sixties they were, translated into German. But why did the scientific work of Lewin find a way back to Germany? It is not difficult to see that there was a scientific vacuum in Germany after the Second World War. The United States became not only the economic, but also the scientific leader of the western world. Lewin's work came back to Germany in a whole wave of American scientific literature. His publications did not seem to be more important than those of other scientist at the time.

By now me know that not all of the American scientific export was of advantage to European psychology, because some old and fruitful European traditions were at times covered by superficial and theoretically not very far reaching concepts.

Lewin's rediscovery in Germany can he divided into two phases. The first begins with the recognition that Lewin was originally a German behavioral scientist living in Berlin. There he had already had many ideas of great influence and also a great number of later well - known students.

In this first post - war phase he was already discussed and cited in German psychology, but nobody seemed to understand and really accept him.

Lewin did not use statistical formulas, he was not talking about terms like aptitude - treatment - interactions as the European psychologists had learned from the U.S. before.

On the one hand Lewin did think like a mathematician but on the other hand he described his field theory in unusual terms of topology. These facts were too confusing for German psychologists. The result was an unconscious inner resistance against Lewin.

During the second phase in Germany Lewin's ideas were used in a way, which he would have signified as a correct way, if he were still alive.

His most important books and articles have been published and more of them will be edited by well-known German psychologists in the next few months (e.g. Graumann). Lewin's comeback is a part of the growing interest in the environmental influence on human behavior. One of several traditions in this area is the social emotional climate research.

## The Social Emotional Climate Research

Social emotional climate research is not new in Germany. Many of the older scientists already wrote about problems like group climate or atmosphere. No doubt that the importance of social climate was recognized many years before the first questionnaire concerning this subject matter was constructed. Social climate is a typically psychological problem, because it is significant for human behavior.

Climate can be defined as the shared experiences of members in a group. With other words, social climate exists whenever every individual of a group constructs the same subjective environment in a common objective one. This is the basic definition; obviously others can be found in the literature (Whithall, 1949; Chemnitz, 1978).

Sometimes climate is characterized as the "personality" of an environment (Moos, 1979). This comparison is quite illustrative, because the common judgement of many persons concerning individual is defined exactly in this way. The word climate came from meteorology, but it is originally based on a Greek word which was used by Aristoteles to describe the height of the sun.

Unfortunately this word has been transferred into human sciences. Climate implicates a long-term subjective world of the individuals of a group. But if the researcher is interested in fast changes of the subjective environment, "weather" might be the more appropriate term (Diederich, 1984).

In spite of the existence of earlier European philosophical thought concerning subjective definitions of the world, the social emotional climate research itself has come to Germany from the United States. There were especially the two American research groups around Moos and Walberg, who are both well known in Germany. These two groups again influenced an Australien research project (Fraser, Fisher) as well as a number of German scientists (Fend, Kahl, Dreesmann). The problem is that these projects were not led by theoretical considerations, but by well-known questionnaires of Moos and Walberg. Accordingly research was to a large extent "theory-less".
Empirical results available at this point show that the subjective view of the world can be utilized as a valid predictor for individual and group behavior. At this point attempts are being made in younger research projects to find out the theoretical foundation for these results so to speak a posteriori (v. Saldern, 1984).

Theoretical Foundations of Social-Emotional Climate Research

There is no question about the importance of Lewin's definition of the environment as a subjective one. But in the scientific world he was not the first who tried to include this definition into a broad theory of human behavior.
An early group at the Chicago University created a theory which is well-known as Symbolic Interactionism. One of the founders of this theory was W.T.Thomas, after whom the wide spread Thomas-Theorem was named: If men defin situations as real, they are real in their consequences (Thomas & Thomas, 1928). So the definiton of a situation is a construction of reality (Ball, 1970). The most important aspect of climate research is the fact that the environment is only similar for all persons in a group as long as they all construct the social reality in the same way.
Next to W.I. Thomas stood C.H. Cooley, who tried to find synthesis between the pure behaviorism (Watson) and the pragmatism

in its American form (Helle, 1977). Already 1926 he distinguished between objective environment and social reality. Thomas and F. Znaniecki (1981) enlarged upon this thought in the following way: the person is the subjective factor, society the objective one. The person is able to change the objective environment by means of action. The empirical research of Thomas and his collegues about Polish people who immigrate to the United States shows that the process of adjustment to the new culture is one of the most interesting group processes someone can explore.

G.H. Mead, the most prominent figure of the Symbolic Interactionism, did not publish very much. His student H. Blumer (1969) however reviewed the theory of Symbolic Interactionism in a way which shows the parallel to Lewin's theory:

1. A person acts because of the meaning of the objective world.
2. The meaning of this world results from the interactions with other persons. Meaning is a social product.
3. A person can change meanings by communicating with himself or with others.

The link between Lewin and Thomas can be found in their common definition of situation. Lewin defined environment or situation as a subjective one, Thomas and the later Symbolic Interactionists tried to express the same idea with the term meaning of the world.
Another aspects is common to both of their concepts: the difficulty to distinguish between the subject and the object in the methodological transfer into empirical research. This is obvioursly one reason why both theories open the way to action research and to ethnomethodology.
It has been shown that Symbolic Interactionism is the older theory compared to Lewin's, with some similar assumptions which can be the basis for climate research. It would be very interesting historically to find out whether Lewin knew the

work of W.I. Thomas. One year before Lewin was born (1889), Thomas visited Berlin, the later domain of Lewin. There is no indication known whether Lewin ever had contact with the early Chicago School. According to my knowledge he never cited Thomas or other Symbolic Interactionists.

There are several other theoretical concepts which have had an influence on social climate research.
In the following some of these concepts are described and compared to Lewin's ideas.
Sometimes the scientific impact of Lewin's theories did not find its way to social emotional climate research directly, but rather indirectly via later theories.

At first glance the environmental psychology of J.W. Wohlwill (1970) seems very interesting for social climate research. Wohlwill prefers a simple model in which human behavior is explained by the objective environment and the person. At the same time the person is influenced by the environment. On the other hand the environment is determined by the behavior of a person (s. Fig. 1).

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(Insert figure 1 here)

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Wohlwill criticizes certain concepts as for example those of Lewin, because the subjective environment confounds person and objective environment: if environment is a function of behavior and again behavior a function of environment, nobody can distinguish between the two. Accordingly, Wohlwill wrote about the "circularity of behavior and environment" (Wohlwill, 1973, Becker, 1978).
As it will be described in detail later, some theoretical concepts include the objective environment as an exogene variable. The problem is, how to conceive the objective world as it is. Since the famous German philosopher Immanuel Kant; it has been generally accepted that world is subjective per se.

So an important question in psychology has been answered in detail by philosophers of science. Some articles of Lewin show that he was interested in these problems, which were not necessarily an integral part of his own discipline. Lewin was well informed about the Vienna Circle ("Wiener Kreis"), where philosophical problems were discussed informally. The question to which degree and when Lewins work was influenced by this group, would be of great interest here.

Another very interesting theory comes from R.F. Barker (1968), who was Lewin's collegue and received the Kurt-Lewin-Memorial-Award 1963. Barker's "ecological psychology" (which should not be confused with the same term as it was used by E. Brunswik) characterizes Lewin's theory as an "encapsulated psychology", because it ignored extra-personal factors. Barker himself concentrates his research on these factors. His main environmental unit is called "behavior setting", an attempt to describe and explain the connection between behavior and environment (Synomorphy). This "bio-physical unit" (Barkers wife was a biologist) forces many individuals to a very similar behavior. Thus Schoggen defines the behavior setting as an "environmental force unit". Empirical results show that Barker was able to describe human communities precisely with this concept. But this was done with a very high methodological expenditure and not on the basis of a sound theory (Barker himself calls ecological data a theoretical).
Barkers deterministic approach shows in the sense of Lewin that the comparison of many individuals can lead to extra-personal values and determinators of human behavior. This is, of course, a fruitful result for social climate research.
The sociological norm-concept supports this result as well.
There is one central point among others where me can find a decisive difference between Lewin and Barker: whereas theory was most important for Lewin, it was irrelevant for Barker.

In recent years the discussion of Lewin's and Brunswik's (1943, 1955) theories has come to the foreground (see Wolf, 1983).

The main difference between these two scientists can be found in their definition of environment. Brunswik prefers to work with the "distal stimulus" as it exists physically. So Brunswik's criticism in respect to Lewin is, that the latter was not able to systematize environment and its different meanings. The description of Brunswik's theory is given by Wolf. No doubt Brunswik's concept could have been as successful as Lewin's in the United States. But Brunswik could not adjust to the new situation as an immigrant as well as Lewin did. Also he had problems in learning the language of his new country. The formulation of his theory as well as his thought concerning experimental design and philosophy of science are of great interest for present research.
The impact of Brunswik's theory, however, could not be as far-reaching as Lewin's because the transfer from theory into practice can be carried out more easily in Lewin's concept. There are only few empirical research projects published which refer to Brunswik. Some of these projects (Jessor & Jessor, 1977) even come to interpretations which show, great parallels to Lewin's concept.

Another theory to describe and explain human behavior is the need-press-concept of H. Murray (1938). His influence on social climate research was similar to that of Lewin's, especially in the thirties. He recognized early that psychology was not able to explain human behavior as long as the environment was not included. Murray's concept is a kind of early interactionism of environmental influences (press) and personal necessities (needs). Needs and press are related to each other in sets, which are called "themes". The new idea of Murray was the distinction between the objective environment (alpha press) and the environment as it is seen by the person (beta press). Beta press and the needs lead to behavior, which is a result of the difference in relation between the two (s. Fig. 2).

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(Insert figure 2 here.)

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I. Stern (1970) made an important contribution to Murrays concept: the beta press is divided into consensual and private beta press. Whenever persons of one group experience the same beta press, it is a consensual one, in other cases it would be called private beta press. Stern's idea is obviously important for social climate research, because with it the group itself, has become a subject of research. This concept can be accepted in the sense of Lewin: The objective environment is outside of the person and not directly related to human behavior.
Some empirical work based on Murray's concept has been carried out in Germany (Schneewind & Lortz, 1978, Schreiner, 1973).
It is not solved, however, how the connection between press and needs works. Murray himself left it open. There are also some other reasons, why Lewin's theory is more effective. Murray did not consider that a need can lead to a specific view of the environment. Accordingly needs and press are not independent factors. The distinction is therefore an artificial one. Considering this realization we have once again to rely upon Lewin.

A scientist who considers himself to have followed in Lewin's footsteps is U. Bronfenbrenner. He characterizes Lewin as a giant in social sciences. Bronfenbrenner's aim is to specify the topological regions developed by Lewin, which were formulated, however, only in a very abstract way. Each of Lewin's regions has a value of its own; Bronfenbrenner tries to describe these in a hierarchical structure of systems. The basic system is the microsystem, whic can be described as the subjective world of a person. The others given by Bronfenbrenner are the meso-, exo- and macrosystem. The mesosystem is a set of settings, which are important for the person (family, peers). The exo-system includes mass media, working world and so on. The macro-system is the culture or political system (see Fig. 3) in which as person lives.

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(Insert Figur 3 here)

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Bronfenbrenner's units are valuable in order to describe the behavior of any person. If someone tries to explain the difference of behavior of two students in a class, the microsystem is more important than, for example, the macrosystem. Thus the value of this concept can be seen in the intercultural comparison of human behavior. Considering this it can be seen an extension of Lewin's theory. For social climate research the microsystem is the most important unit, which again is, in some respect, only a reformulation of Lewin's ideas concerning cognitive development in an impressine way: the development of a person is the development of the way a person sees his/her environment. In social climate research we find only few longitudinal studies, but it seems that the results of these few can support the above hypothesis.

One concept which belongs to the psychology of thought seems to be very useful for the discussion of person-environment interaction. It is called the "concept of isomorphy". The authors (Oerter, Dreher & Dreher, 1977) criticize the various theories in psychology of thought, because according to them these theories exclude the environment from thought processes. Oerter et al. define the objective environment as the "objective structure", whereas its cognitive representation is called the "subjective structure". So they prefer the same dichotomism as Murray, for example. When two elements of the objective and subjective structure correspond, then this is an "isomorphism". Isomorphism can be accomplished by means of action. Beyond the subjective structure in the person there is internal value which is similar to the needs defined by Murray. Both influence the "executive", which itself can change the subjective structure and lead to behavior (see Fig. 4).

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(Insert Figure 4 here)

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The basic idea of this concept is not a new one. It is, however, not necessarily of greater value than the need-press model has been for the explanation of human behavior.

It is only natural that social climate research cannot neglect the well-known dispute called the interactionism-debate. Everybody is familiar with the three concept for the explanation of human behavior: personalism, situationalism and interactionism. No doubt the first two were not very useful and a step backwards compared to Lewin's ideas. The early interactionism had a purely mechanical view of the problems, a view which was not productive. The later interactionism - the dynamic one - undoubtedly rediscovered Lewin or the Symbolic Interactionism by including the subjective situation in explaining human behavior (see books and articles by Endler and Magnusson). Again it should be interesting to ask why scientific simplifications like the personalism, the situationalism and the early form of interactionism could have been of such a great influence.

A last scientific group of theories to be discussed are the social learning theories of Rotter (1955), Mischel (1968) and Bandura (1979). These theories do not work when the subjective situation is excluded. The difference to Lewin is the more differentiated analysis of the processes of how the definition of the situation is developed. Lewin talked about a field "at a given time" and thus restricts the definition of a situation to a certain point of time. Social learning theories assume that the definition of the situation depends on the individual learning history. With this they are a welcome completion of Lewin.

This short discussion of different theories shows that there are enough resources for social-emotional climate research. Most of these theories are undoubtedly influenced by Lewin's definition of the situation. Theories which are in opposition to Lewin's cannot easily he transferred into practice. Some theories can be seen as a welcome addition to Lewin's concept.

All of the discussed theories contain statements about individuals and their view of the environment. Social emotional climate, however, is a construct, which applies to groups and not to one individual. So it must be taken into account that the above theories can be a first step, but are not a sufficient theoretical foundation for social emotional climate research. The second step necessary here would be the explanation of why different

individuals come to the same subjective environment. This leads us to the problem of group dynamics and processes, which is an another broad area and therefore excluded here.
Another interesting question is, whether the theories applicable to social-emotional climate are explicitly used in present research projects.

The Practice in Social Emotional Climate Research

It can be shown easily that the published books and articles about climate research do not contain an explicit theoretical discussion about the theoretical foundations which have been discussed in the section before. It seems to be common practice to neglect these foundations. Introductions contain short quotations of some of the basic theoretical background. No doubt Lewin is cited most often. An extensive discussion in that respect has not been found.
A common strategy in social-emotional climate research is to emphasize the importance of the subjective environment and immediately after that to come to the construction of instruments, among which the questionnaire is the most preferred one.
The statements used in such a questionnaire are found by means of interviews of the reference group. This is followed by a reliability analysis, a factor analysis and finally correlations are set up.
It is not difficult to see that this strategy leaves a big discrepancy between theory and empirical work. In addition to this the German questionnaires (see Dreesmann, 1982) usually consist of a mixture of translation, transfer, and transposition of American questionnaires into German culture.
This kind of questionnaires with their social climate factors are formal analogies to the trait questionnaires which are developed in personality research. It is not possible to detect dynamic processes with these instruments.
Lewin himself did not criticize the use of questionnaires, but the interpretation of the results of questionnaires as

objective findings.
On the other hand, the results of the immense number of publications existent show that social-emotional climate is a valid predictor for scholastic achievement among others. Therefore the solution cannot be to do away with this kind of research (s. Wolf, 1984), but to think about what happens when questionnaires are used in social-emotional climate research and to remember the way Lewin tried to solve this problem.

Historically seen there are two major traditions: Lewin's basic theoretical formulations and the use of questionnaires in personality research. The combination of the two can be found in social emotional climate research.

## Lewin's Empirical Contribution to Social Emotional Climate Research

It has always been stressed that Lewin's contribution to social emotional climate research was primarily a theoretical one. It may be appropriate to raise the question whether Lewin and his collegues contributed empirical results as well. One important article by Lewin, Lippit & White (1939) stands for many empirical studies of this group. In "Patterns of aggressive behavior in experimentally created 'social climates'" the authors investigate and discuss human behavior in different social emotional climates. This research project may have been motivated by the political events in Lewin's mother country.
It has been said before that Moos created the term "personality" to describe the climate of a group. The above mentioned article, however, shows that this way of reducing the complex information about a group was used already before Moos. Here Lewin et al. talked about the "individuality of the club".
At a first glance this article is not associated with social emotional climate research, but primarily with leadership style investigations. Lewin and his group created a new research strategy, which initiated many publications and follow-up

research projects in this area.
Up to the famous book by Duncan & Biddle (1974) climate was synonymous with leadership style. It was even later that social emotional climate research became an independent discipline.

Another very important part of the large and famous work done by Lewin is his social research in factories. Lewin and his group are the founder of organizational climate research (see Schneider). It can be observed that today there are two traditions of social emotional climate research: one applies to the domain of education, the other to the field of industrial management. Both traditions have the same theoretical background, but did not have any stimulating effects on each other. Today theories and empirical studies in organizational climate research are far more differentiated than in scholastic research. It cannot be denied that the sources of this differentiation can be found in the early work of Lewin in organizational research.

In summary, the characterization of Lewin as given by Bronfenbrenner as a "brilliant giant" can be strongly supported when we analyze social emotional climate research today.

Notes

1) Paper presented at the "International Kurt-Lewin-Conference" at Temple University, Philadelphia, PA, May 2nd - 5th, 1984.

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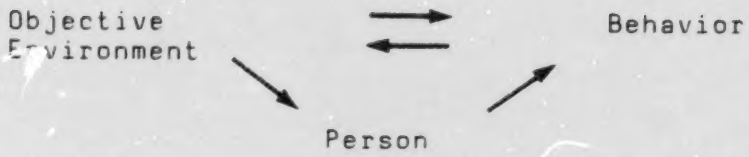


Fig. 1: The Concept of J.W. Wohlwill

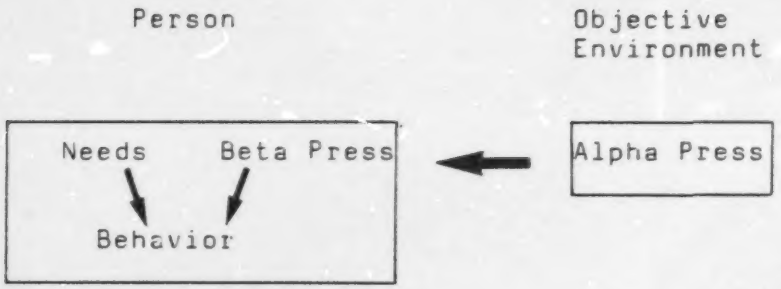


Fig. 2: Need-press Model of Murray (1938)

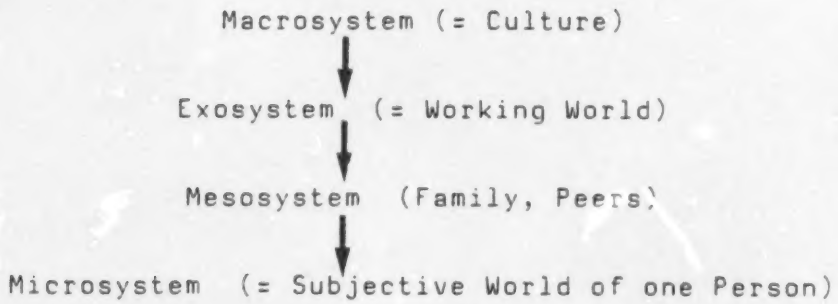


Fig. 3: Bronfenbrenner's Concept of Hierarchical Reality

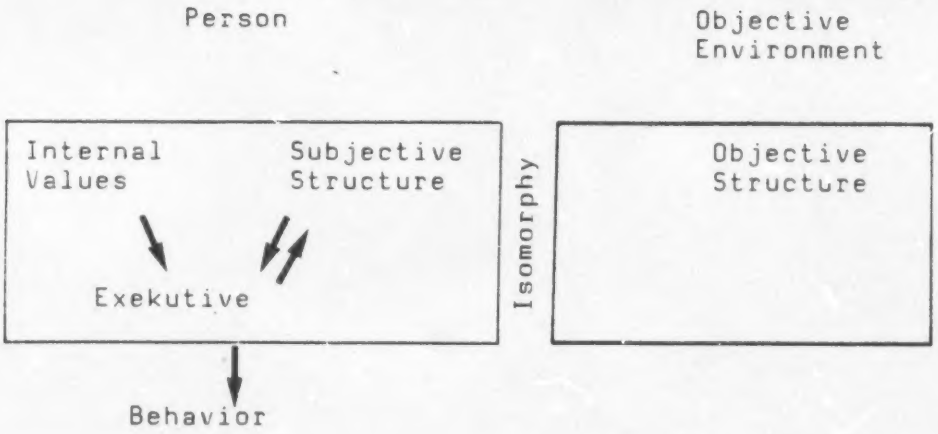


Fig. 4: The Concept of Isomorphy of Oerter et al.